

Nelson Henricks



≡ MAC

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In this exhibition, Henricks presents two new video installations. The first, *Don't You Like the Green of A?*, is based on the correspondences between letters and colours specific to Mitchell's synaesthesia – a condition that Henricks happens to share with her. Synaesthesia is a neurological syndrome in which perception by one sense automatically triggers a perception in one of the other senses. This connectivity between senses may be manifested in different ways. For example, in grapheme-colour synaesthesia, numbers or letters are associated with colours; in music-colour synaesthesia, people perceive colour by hearing a sound or music.

This new project returns to a structure that Henricks previously adopted in at least two works: *Monochrome A to Z (Synaesthesia Paintings)* (2012–14) and *Monochrome A to Z (for Grapheme-Colour Synaesthetes)* (2012). In the former work, a series of twenty-six monochrome paintings, of an identical small size, show the colours that Henricks associates with each letter of the alphabet. In the latter work, each of the twenty-six drawings presents a single letter, repeated until the surface is entirely covered. *Don't You Like the Green of A?* is made, instead, from Joan Mitchell's associations between letters of the alphabet and certain colours, and is presented as a more elaborate combination of these associations. The installation also features monochrome paintings, but they are accompanied by wallpaper, projection of coloured light, as well as a business suit and smock that reflect Mitchell's chromatic alphabet. Specifically, the coloured checkerboards that cover these elements reproduce the sequence of letters in the alphabet (on the wallpaper and the smock) or spell out the title of the installation, *Don't You Like the Green of A?* (on the business suit and in the light projection).

On the wallpapered wall, a video work is presented on a monitor. Acting as keystone to the installation, the video features two versions of Henricks: one wearing the business suit (the “curator”) and the other wearing the smock (the “artist”). (These are the very garments that are in the installation, presented on hangers mounted on microphone stands and placed on small rolling platforms). In the video, the relationship between the two protagonists is almost affectless. The “curator,” expressionless, acts as an intermediary between the “artist” and the spectator. Every now and then, he holds out a microphone to capture the sounds that the colours used in Mitchell's paintings might make. Indeed, for some people with synaesthesia, letters (here associated with a colour) trigger a sound or tone. Thus, Henricks follows an approach he established in 2012, addressing synaesthesia not only as a subject but also as a methodology.

Set in the exhibition space on rear-projection screens, the second work in the exhibition, *Heads Will Roll*, is a four-channel video installation showing a series of actions executed by collaborators (performers, musicians, and dancers) that explore the dissenting, even revolutionary, potential of noise and music. These actions, executed on, with, and around drums, pots, pans, books, and electric guitars, among other items, are edited to form a whole with a soundtrack that creates an immersive audiovisual experience, where the images are subordinated to a musical or rhythmic imperative.

The work is inspired by the spring 2012 popular protests in Québec: every evening, thousands of people surged into the street banging pots to express, festively, their discontent with the coercive measures deployed by the government of the time to quash student strikes. Noise as an expression of public contestation goes back to the late Middle Ages, but it resurfaced in Chile (*cacerolazo*) in 1971



Over an art career of more than thirty years, Nelson Henricks has developed a double approach to his work. On the one hand, he creates immersive artworks in which the rhythmic editing of sound and images creates a unique musical dynamic. On the other hand, he has elaborated a research-creation approach to the exploration of different subjects taken from cultural history, such as the novel *Tristram Shandy* by Laurence Sterne (1713–1768), lectures by Oscar Wilde (1854–1900), gay pornography produced in the San Francisco area in the 1970s, and most recently, the synaesthesia of the painter Joan Mitchell (1925–1992).

Nelson Henricks's works impel us to ask exactly how an artwork shapes an idea, and how this shaping is perceived by the spectators who experience it. How does its form express the content that is its source? We could compare this fundamental aspect of the artwork to the distinction between the “back end” (what underlies or supports but remains invisible) and the “front end” (which acts as the interface and is visible) of a technical process. Unlike an artwork, however, a technical process calls for an interaction that foregrounds the object's how and why and seeks to introduce an undisturbed, undistracted experience. In theory, shouldn't a seamless interaction with the user take precedence?

But what if such an experience, presumably undisturbed, were to be accompanied by an unpredicted or unexpected effect that disrupts its comprehension or interpretation, to the point that we question our own senses? The automatic, almost machine-like, aspect of technical processes is in obvious contrast with the freedom associated with subjective artistic expression. So, how do we account for what separates our experience of an artwork from what it contains as content and from what slips away or is added along the way?

and the mid-1980s, in Argentina during the banking crises of 2001–02, during protests over Spain's participation in the invasion of Iraq in 2003, after the collapse of banks in Iceland in 2008, and most recently in Spain and Brazil (among other countries) during the lockdowns related to the COVID-19 crisis. Thus, in addition to providing the sights (and sounds) of scenes in which a percussionist performs on pots and pans, Henricks alludes to politics and ideology by orchestrating flags, books, and demonstrators in a tight, fast-paced montage that transitions from more harmonious sequences to highly chaotic or noisy scenes.

On the one hand, the work seems to offer a reflection on noise as a form of collective expression. It explores how we demonstrate, in the sense of participating in a demonstration but also in the sense of declaration, revelation, or expression. On the other hand, it highlights the way in which one individual suffers the presence of others. The figure wearing a cap/mask made from a drum, whom Henricks dubs Drumhead, looks quietly, impassively, even sadly, at the spectator as water is poured over his head. Is Drumhead the anonymous, lonesome individual, cut off from the world, who is still unaware of his potential agency? Revealingly, the helmet/mask has no opening for the mouth. It makes a sound only when hit.

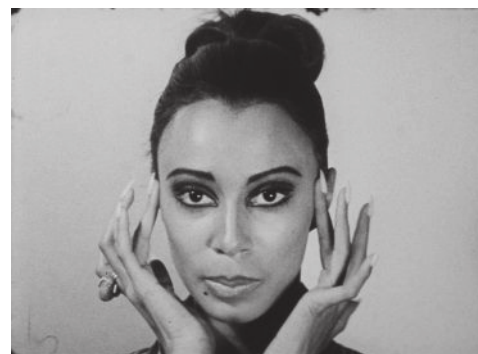
Heads Will Roll develops approaches found also in the video installation *Unwriting* (2010), recently acquired by the MAC and presented in its galleries in 2021. This work evokes the difficulties involved in expressing an idea by using words; in passing from the abstract to the concrete; in externalizing something internal; and, as the artist says about the work, in passing from “the beauty of thinking a thought” to “the beauty of rendering a thought through words.” Indeed, this reflection on writer's block weaves together texts, sounds, and images associated with writing on an undefined white background. The work, also deployed on four screens, starts – as does *Heads Will Roll* – with a call to attention: a closeup on hands producing a rhythm; the image quickly multiplies and goes out of phase. But *Heads Will Roll* displaces (dislocates) the premise of *Unwriting*. Whereas the earlier work raises the question of pitfalls and false starts that affect the solitary author, the more recent work raises, as mentioned above, the question of collective expression: how does a group come to reveal something that goes beyond the sum of the specific perspectives of the individuals who form it? What is brought forth and what is lost along the way? How does the *front end* unpredictably convey or betray its *back end*?

Mark Lancôt



BIOGRAPHY

Born in Bow Island, Alberta, in 1963, Nelson Henricks has lived and worked in Montréal since 1991. Known mainly for his video works, he has developed a multi-disciplinary approach (painting, sculpture, writing) to explore how audiovisual data from different sources overlap with and influence each other. He has taught art history and video production at Concordia University. His work has been presented constantly in Canada and abroad since the early 1990s. His works are in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Museum of Fine Arts of Montreal, the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, the National Gallery of Canada, and many corporate and private collections. He is represented by Paul Petro Contemporary Art, in Toronto.



Andy Warhol, *Donyale Luna* [ST 195], 1965
16mm film, black-and-white, silent,
4.5 minutes at 16 frames per second
© The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA,
a museum of Carnegie Institute. All rights reserved.
Courtesy The Andy Warhol Museum

Andy Warhol's Screen Tests

Presented in conjunction with the exhibition *Nelson Henricks*, the *Screen Tests* highlight the connections between the two artists' practices. In the installation *Heads Will Roll*, people and faces are presented in ways that become monumental or sculptural. These parallels to Warhol's subjects in the *Screen Tests* may appear to be primarily aesthetic, but they are also bound up in notions of queerness and communities of actors/agents.

This program is made possible thanks to the collaboration of the Andy Warhol Museum.

EDUCATION

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Walkthrough

With Nelson Henricks and Mark Lanctôt, Curator of the exhibition
Visit in French: Wednesday, November 23, 2022, at 5:30 p.m.
Visit in English: Wednesday, January 18, 2023, at 5:30 p.m.

Viewpoints

Nelson Henricks as seen by Raquel Cruz Crespo
Wednesday, February 15, 2023, at 5:30 p.m.

Nelson Henricks as seen by Maude Veilleux
Wednesday, February 22, 2023, at 5:30 p.m.

Nelson Henricks as seen by Claire Savoie
Wednesday, March 1, 2023, at 5:30 p.m.

Concert

Exclusive performance by Stuart Jackson in the installation *Heads Will Roll*
Wednesday, November 30, 2022, at 6 p.m.

ART WORKSHOPS

En famille at the MAC: for the entire family (4 and older) (\$)
Every first Saturday of the month:
From December 3, 2022, to April 1, 2023, at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m.
And during Spring Break:
From Tuesday, February 28, to Friday, March 3, 2023, at 1 p.m.

Creative Moments: Workshops for adults (\$)
On Tuesdays, February 14 and 21, 2023. From 1:30 to 4 p.m.
On Wednesdays, February 15 and 22, 2023. From 1:30 to 4 p.m.

Tandem Workshops / Group Visits

School groups (free)
Community groups (free)
Adult groups (\$)
From November 23, 2022, to April 6, 2023

ART MEDIATOR IN THE GALLERIES

An art mediator is present in the galleries to exchange with visitors on the issues raised by the exhibition and answer questions.
Bilingual interactive tours are offered without reservation during these periods (included with admission).

SCHEDULE

Thursdays and Fridays

- Presence of an art mediator
from 4 to 7 p.m.
- Interactive tour at 5:30 p.m.

Saturdays and Sundays

- Presence of an art mediator
from 2 to 5 p.m.
- Interactive tour at 3 p.m.

Tours are also offered with a reservation for groups of 10 or more.
Reservations and information at 514 847-6253/reservation.education@macm.org
Please visit the Musée's website for more details and other upcoming events.

ACCESSIBILITY

The exhibited video artworks have been made available with descriptive captioning and visual descriptions at www.macm.org/en/nelson-henricks, and in the galleries by scanning a QR code.
Made possible with the support of the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications du Québec.

EXHIBITED WORKS

1
Don't You Like the Green of A?, 2022
Video installation, sound, colour,
10 min 29 s. With the support of the
Conseil des arts et des lettres du
Québec, and The Concordia University
Part-time Faculty Association.
©Nelson Henricks. Courtesy the artist
and Paul Petro Contemporary Art,
Toronto

2
Drumhead I and Drumhead II, 2022
Wood, plastic, metal, synthetic
drumheads. 25,4 x 25,4 cm (10 x 10 in).
With the support of the Canada Council
for the Arts. ©Nelson Henricks. Courtesy
the artist and Paul Petro Contemporary
Art, Toronto

3
Heads Will Roll, 2022
Four-channel video installation, sound,
colour, 18 min 55 s. With the support
of the Canada Council for the Arts.
©Nelson Henricks. Courtesy the artist
and Paul Petro Contemporary Art,
Toronto

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